

Tape 53

Side A, 4 1/16 - 4 1/8

30 JUN 1980

MEMORANDUM FOR: PB/NSC Coordinator

FROM: D C I

SUBJECT: Item for Next SecDef Meeting

Gene Tighe's assignment.

Xerox cy to Jay

Soviet's Afghan Action: Pullout or Tactical Shift?

By DREW MIDDLETON

The widely advertised withdrawal of some Soviet units from Afghanistan appears to be part of a change in the nature of the forces. Heavy-weapons units, tanks, air-defense missiles and surface-to-surface missiles are leaving and being replaced by the infantry essential to Soviet success in a guerrilla campaign.

Military Analysis

The composition of the forces being withdrawn, analysts said, is consistent with the changes in tactics forced upon the Soviet military planners by their original misconceptions of the military problem. The Russians, analysts agreed, believed that tactics suitable for the invasion of Central Europe would succeed against an ill-armed but flexible enemy in a country where roads for tanks are few and poorly maintained.

United States, British and Chinese analysts agree that the forces withdrawn include at least one tank regiment, one to three surface-to-surface missile batteries, at least two air-defense missile batteries, some armored personnel carrier units and maintenance units for these and other heavy weapons.

Number Put at 10,000

The number count, they said, is about 10,000 men, or just under the authorized strength of a Soviet motor rifle division.

Heavy units have been of minor value in coping with scattered bands of Afghan insurgents. United States intelligence sources predicted in April that the Soviet high command would realize that light infantry deployed by helicopter was the answer to guerrilla activity rather than heavy air strikes and massive armored attacks.

There is some evidence, the analysts said, that the forces withdrawn from Afghanistan will go no further than the area of Soviet Turkmenia, just north of Afghanistan. The district's headquarters is at Samarkand.

Meanwhile, infantry units of company and battalion strength are being moved by transport planes and trucks into northern Afghanistan, where their arrival cannot be readily observed and reported to Western governments.

"The buildup is gradual and methodical," one analyst said. "While these infantry units enter Afghanistan, it is likely that there will be another well-publicized withdrawal of heavy units. But in terms of winning the campaign, the infantry is far more important than the heavy stuff."

Reinforcements Expected

There also is some evidence that the replacement program will in time be followed by a major reinforcement from the estimated 30,000 troops in reserve just across the Afghan-Soviet frontier. Most military analysts agree that the Soviet

tory is beyond the Soviet grasp with the present level of 80,000 men in the country.

Analysts argue that this total has been altered only marginally by the reported withdrawal. Last week, there was a sudden increase in the number of Soviet transport aircraft, Antonov-12's and Antonov-22's, landing by night at Kabul airport. These aircraft, it is thought, carried some of the infantry intended to replace the heavy units.

After the first month of the invasion the Soviet tactics of sending massive armored columns against villages and rebel strongholds proved only marginally successful.

The fighting in Paktia Province last week apparently taught the Soviet high command two lessons. One was that armored columns are vulnerable to ambush. One tank unit was surprised and shot up in the Sultani Valley near Urgun, apparently because it was not preceded by light infantry patrols. The second lesson was that fighting close to the Pakistani frontier is likely to attract refugees back into the battle.

According to a British source, several thousand men from Paktia left a refugee camp at Miramshah in Pakistan to join the battle against Soviet armored columns around Urgun and Gardez.

Afghan Regime a Problem

Another serious Soviet problem is the military and political unreliability of the Afghan Government.

Moscow has been told, according to a British analyst, that under present circumstances no pro-Soviet Afghan government could control the country after the departure of Soviet troops.

The virtual collapse of the Afghan Army as a fighting force means some analysts said that the Russians, once the political dividends of the present reported withdrawal are spent, must think seriously of raising troop levels in Afghanistan to a figure close to 200,000 men.

On the positive side the Russians know that the insurgents are not receiving any serious external aid in weapons and supplies. But they cannot understand, a British source said, why, in this situation, the resistance continues. He also said that in view of the numerical weakness of effective insurgent forces—probably about 75,000 men in widely scattered bands—no amount of weapons would suffice to halt an all out Russian effort.

Analysts generally warn against clinging to any idea that the Russian are involved in a "Vietnam situation." The Russians' position is more difficult, militarily and politically, than they anticipated, one said. But as long as there is no unifying force to control the insurgents and no outside power willing and able to supply the rebels with weapons, the Russians eventually will succeed in pacifying